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Homeland Republicans Demand Hearing, Classified Brief on Transfer of GTMO Detainees to Illinois Maximum-Security Prison

Urge Chairman Thompson to Convene Briefing and Hearing Before Congress Adjourns

Washington, D.C. (Tuesday, December 15, 2009) – Today, U.S. Rep. Peter T. King (R-NY), Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and all 12 Committee on Homeland Security Republicans sent a letter to Chairman Bennie G. Thompson, demanding both a classified briefing and a full Committee hearing on the Obama Administration's decision to import Guantanamo Bay detainees to Thomson Correctional Center, a state maximum-security prison in Thomson, Illinois.

In the letter to Thompson, Homeland Security Republicans said that the role of the Department of Homeland Security is, "clear and integral," and "demands immediate oversight action by the Committee to allow its Members to obtain critical information on the Administration's plans and related security implications."

The text of the letter follows:

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Today it was reported that President Obama will direct the Federal Government to purchase the Thomson Correctional Center, a state maximum-security prison in Thomson, Illinois for the

purpose of transferring terrorists detained at the United States Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to the United States.

In light of the significant homeland security implications of this decision, we are writing to urge you to schedule an immediate classified briefing for Members of the Committee on Homeland Security with senior officials from the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Defense. We also urge you to schedule a full Committee hearing with witnesses from these Departments prior to Congress adjourning this month.

The homeland security implications of this decision include the direct role of the Department of Homeland Security, the heightened security risks to the surrounding community, and the increased threat of domestic radicalization within the Thomson facility. In her December 2nd speech in New York City, Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano stated, “home-based terrorism is here,” and today the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment held a hearing on the radicalization of individuals in the United States – including in our prisons.

Also today, the Administration formally notified Illinois Governor Pat Quinn of the transfer of detainees to the Thomson Correctional Center. The Administration’s letter – co-signed by Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano – stated that “Federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Defense, will work closely with state and local law enforcement authorities to identify and mitigate any risks, including sharing information through the state’s ‘fusion center’ and working with the Federal Joint Terrorism Task Force.” This clear and integral role for the Department of Homeland Security demands immediate oversight action by the Committee to allow its Members to obtain critical information on the Administration’s plans and related security implications.

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
December 15, 2009
Page two

In your letter of October 29, 2009, to Representative Dent responding to his request for a Committee Member site visit to Guantanamo, you noted that “Congress and the Administration have taken significant steps to advance President Obama’s executive orders to proficiently close the Guantanamo Detention Facilities and review the cases of detainees for transfer or prosecution.” You also stated that the “results of these efforts merit the Committee’s attention.”

The time for the Committee’s attention is now.

We look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner to hold a classified Member briefing and hearing *prior to* adjournment of the First Session of the 111th Congress to ensure all Committee Members have the information they need to exercise effective oversight over the homeland security implications of transferring Guantanamo detainees to our country.

Sincerely,